

Popular by Association by chr1ssy-x

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Summary: Mike Wheeler and his friends? They just existed. And they were okay with it, until a new girl stumbles her way through the big doors of Hell that is called Hawkins High. She's cousins with the most popular girl in school, Stacey. So, why was she so interested in Mike Wheeler and his party? She was popular. At least, she was by association.

Popular by Association

So this plot idea was because I read a Mileven story with this plot and I wanted to do my own version of it! Definitely much different so just to be clear no I'm not stealing someone else's writing just using the same plot but making it VERY different which we don't see too much of, but I mean El and Stacey cousins? That's pretty crazy lol. But enough of my talking here's the first chapter and the full summary too!

Full Summary:

"Mike Wheeler existed. That was it. Him and his friends were normal, boring, anti-social high school boys. To some they were those smart kids in AV club. To others, they were easily a target for Hawkins High's most notorious bully, Troy, and his clan of mouth breathing, zombified populars. Troy might have been the only person at school to even remember their names, which was quite sad in all honesty. And to the rest, they were just another individual with a blurry face swimming through the sea of kids down the hallway at school everyday. They stayed to themselves and out of the way as much as possible. Mike Wheeler and his friends? They just *existed*. And they were okay with it, until a new girl stumbles her way through the big doors of Hell that is called Hawkins High. She's cousins with the most popular girl in school, *Stacey*. So, why was she so interested in Mike Wheeler and his party? She was popular. At least, she was by *association*. They no longer just existed. She was looking at them. Now, everyone was looking at them..."

The engine sputtered and spewed and the fumes were enough to burn his eyes out of their sockets, but he didn't let up. He couldn't. It was undeniably, the worst first day of high school that Mike Wheeler had yet to experience. *Really?* It may have only been early September, but there was no denying the frost that flew threw the air and out of Mike's mouth as he sighed heavily in defeat. He felt the cold numbness of the Fall weather on his cheeks and the tip of his nose while the ends of his ears burned so intensely he regretted not buying

those ear muffs his mother had insisted on. She was so overly mushy with him in that moment tossing out an '*aw*' and she smiled sweetly at him. Mike had known fairly well that she was imagining the ridiculous ear muffs plopped on his head and he rolled his eyes at the mere memory of him flushing red and denying the ridiculous ear wear over and over again. Now he was silently cursing himself for caring about it so much in that moment, when his ears could be so insanely warm right now instead.

And his car just *had* to go and breakdown on him. On his first day of his Sophomore year. He had a bad feeling about today already as he emerged from his old beaten up car. He loved the 50's era and all, but maybe not so much that he had a car *from* the 50's era. He could have sworn this pile of junk wouldn't have lasted this long, but by the grace of God, it managed. He surveyed the sidewalk at the end of his driveway, sulking as he forced his feet to carry him there.

"Hey, loser!" Mike had just made it about two minutes down his neighborhood street before his head snapped up and he smiled in relief as his eyes scanned the car in front of him, "Need a ride?"

Without hesitation, Mike ran around the side of the car as the sun reflected off of the beautifully glistening red paint and glared right into his brown eyes, "No need to ask me twice."

"Dude, how nice is this car!?" Mike glanced around the car in awe as his best friend Will giddily asked him his opinion.

"How the hell did you afford this, Jonathan?" Mike asked his best friend's older brother in amazement.

"Hey, give me some credit where it's due," Jonathan countered, "I mean, having a decent paying job with one of the most read newspapers in the area does, in fact, have some beautiful rewards, boys." He smirked into the car mirror, feeling insanely proud of the admiration his younger brother and his friend had for his ride. He glanced at Nancy, Mike's older sister, sitting in his passenger seat. Their hands laced together as they laughed for the rest of the ride to drop the boys off. He was certain he'd have to clean up drool puddles from the backseat by the time he let them out at school. Mike and Will said their goodbyes to their older siblings as they turned around

to face one of the places they hated most; *high school*.

From what they had experienced so far, they definitely weren't enjoying it. They had both heard plenty of wonderful stories from Jonathan and Nancy, but it didn't seem like they were having the same luck when it came to socializing and having fun. I mean, don't get me wrong the boys had *fun*. To them anyway, it was fun. *Dungeons and Dragons* was definitely not for everyone, but it brought their friend group so close together over the passed few years that they were practically a family, at this point. Yeah yeah yeah, four 16 year old boys playing medieval board games for 12 hours a day was not the first thing you would think of when picturing high school fun. It was definitely somewhere in the back of all your minds, though... *right?*

Either way you looked at it, they were all similar to each other, but so different from everyone else. They liked having the friends they had in their party and they didn't need anyone else. No one else could understand them, anyway. They were different, but that's what they liked about each other and even about themselves. Besides, being popular was so cliché. DD and endless snacks were always enough for them. It was never a dull time in their party.

Mike and Will broke hold of the stare they had on the building in front of them, to see Dustin and Lucas running toward them from Lucas' car, slamming the doors shut behind them. They smiled at their friends as they all huddled into a circle.

"Guys, remember, head down and stay low. Never attract anyone's attention." Mike warned nervously, breaking the huddle and walking up the steps. They looked at each other as they stepped through the big doors that echoed before they closed heavily behind them.

"With a face like this!? C'mon, you're killing me, Mikey!" The corners of Dustin's eyes wrinkled profusely as he smiled wide, showing off his beautifully straight bottom teeth and his tops nowhere in sight. He had none. That was okay, though. His friends were smart and nonjudgmental people. They know a disease is out of someone's control and they always praised Dustin for embracing his differences so greatly. It was admirable. Plus, they were due to grown in, *eventually*. Dustin always gushed about it, but they could never quite

pinpoint when they were supposed grown in and none of them questioned it. Not even Dustin, he would always say, "*That's what the doctors say, so when it happens, get ready for these pearls, boys.*"

Mike cracked a smile in Dustin's direction, "You got me there." He joked.

"Okay, but seriously, our schedules are so out of whack and we're going to be fendng for ourselves in about half these classes. It's a bit scary, not gonna lie..." Lucas laughed nervously as he scanned over the schedules in all of their hands.

"Yeah, I mean we all have AV club together, but does anything else match up... for *any* of us?" Will furrowed his eyebrows and frowned as he noticed they wouldn't have much luck.

"Hey, I mean we've got history together, Will." Mike perked up as he realized they'd be sharing at least one other class together, "Oh, and Lucas, me and you have gym together. Thank god, if Troy is in our gym class we'll only get half a beating each." He joked, but he knew there was some truth to his words.

"Yup, but you get yours first." Lucas pushed and Mike scoffed at him in disagreement.

"Not if he sees you first, then we'll see how that one works out for you."

"Oh! Dustin we have Algebra 2 together!" Will noticed another class matching up for at least two out of the four of them.

"So it's decided. You're my partner for the whole year for anything. If Mr. Barns has anything to say about it, I'll just tell him I called dibs on you." Dustin shot a thumbs up at Will as the rest of the boys rolled their eyes at him.

"Don't think it works that way, buddy."

They all laughed with each other and suddenly the bell rang. Their stomachs all dropped and the sheer screech behind the ding of the bell made their ears ring and their palms sweat. It was time to part ways and they all had homeroom *and* first period *without* each other.

They all glanced at each other cautiously before bidding their goodbyes and trailing off to look for their respected classrooms.

Oh boy, was Mike Wheeler in for a treat this year.

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Mike settled into a seat toward the back of the classroom. As good a student as he was, he liked to be on his own and away from everyone, unless they were his friends. He pulled out a pencil and notebook just in case he found himself needing to jot down anything important. He kept his head down. **'Stay low'**. His own words echoed in his head and he felt ridiculous for giving himself a mental pep talk, but he let it go. He was being realistic, after all. If you keep your head down, no one will notice you. Right?

"Class, we have a new student joining us today. She just moved to town over the summer so let's all welcome her with a big hello! Why don't you introduce yourself, sweetie?" Mrs. Dwyer spoke softly and Mike's head snapped upward. He couldn't help it, he was curious.

His breath caught in his throat and he almost choked, which thankfully he didn't. *That* would have been quite embarrassing, especially considering it was dead silent before her sweet, smooth voice rang throughout the classroom almost like a song, "Hi, I'm Jane Hopper. You can call me El, don't ask how I ended up with that nickname." She shrugged innocently as a smile painted across her face and Mike could see her mentally curse herself for the words that slipped out of her mouth. He was completely lost in that moment, admiring her wavy shoulder-length brown locks and her doe eyes. They were even more brown than his, was that even possible? He was sure it wasn't. Brown eyes were just brown eyes, weren't they?

No, not hers. Her eyes were so warm and inviting and he felt like he could fall into them if possible and that was the weirdest feeling he's ever felt. Falling into someone's eyes? **'Get your shit together, Mike!'** He mentally scolded himself as he shook his head. His eyes were still glued to her, though. The smile on her face never left and he reveled in how natural it was and he wondered how someone's lips could look so perfect.

'Alright, enough Wheeler!'

He stopped himself again and tore his eyes from her. He had no idea why he was thinking like this. A girl catching his attention? As if he even had a chance? He knew better. Mike Wheeler and his friends were the nerds at this school, or at least one form of nerd, to say the least. And nerds never get the girl.

Do they?

"Find yourself a seat, Jane." Mrs. Dwyer gestured toward the remaining empty seats and for some god awful reason she managed to pick a seat quite close to Mike. He thought nothing of it and looked straight ahead the rest of the 10 minutes that were spent in homeroom, listening to Mrs. Dwyer drone on about the new school year. He tried his hardest to avoid the new pretty girl sitting two desks to his right, pondering why she picked that seat out of them all.

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"Listen, all I'm saying Stacey, is that if you think about it, I'm like the only guy in this whole school who wouldn't hurt you. I practically worship the ground you walk on." Dustin smiled widely in the direction of Hawkins High's most popular girl in school, *Stacey Albright*.

"*Never* gonna happen, toothless." She spat in disgust, followed by laughter throughout her and her group of stuck up popular friends. Troy stalked over to them, looking like the jackass he was; chest puffed out and fists clenched.

"Is this *dweeb* bothering you, Stace?" He questioned, never breaking eye contact with Dustin.

"All under control, Troy. Thank you, though." She batted her lashes at him, undeniably flirting. Troy nodded at her as if to say okay, oblivious to the way her words came out slower and more high pitched, oozing with sugary sweetness.

Mike watched the ordeal from afar as he stepped out of the lunch line and stood alongside his other friends. They seemed to be enjoying the

show, but not when Troy turned to walk off and caught sight of the three standing there, staring at them.

"What are you looking at, nerds!? Don't make me kick your asses!" He roared.

They scrambled off to their table with Dustin in trail. Their table all the way at the end of the lunch room, in the deserted parts. You could drag your finger over the table and collect a fair amount of dust, which always made them wonder if the janitor knew that almost *no one* sat around here so he felt no obligation to clean it. Not even for the four of them.

Mike caught a glimpse of that new girl Jane, standing timidly behind Stacey during it all. So, that's it. She was popular, huh? He laughed to himself a bit and swept his thoughts of her beauty out of his brain. More motivation to forget about how attracted to her he was; *she was popular*. And Mike Wheeler and his friends didn't go together with the popular kids. She was probably a mean, scowling, airhead bitch just like Stacey. He repeated this to himself mentally a thousand times as he sat down, forcing any curiosity about this girl to go away. It worked for the most part, but he closed his eyes and saw hers again, almost falling into them as he pictured them so vividly. He shook himself from his thoughts, cracking his eyes open again.

She was popular and she hung out with Stacey and Troy. That was enough for him to decide she wasn't a good person and that she was just like the rest of the populars.

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Mike found himself looking up to see her face again in yet another class of his. This time when he looked up, she was looking at him.

'What the hell?'

He glared at her, confused and raised his eyebrow slightly. She averted her eyes elsewhere and she sat down two seats in front of him this time, but still... *two seats away*.

English was one of his favorite classes. Writing and reading were

always something he enjoyed. Hell, who was he kidding? Mike Wheeler liked almost every school subject there was. He was a nerd. So were his friends. He didn't care, though. He also did wanna make it out of high school alive, so keeping a low profile and staying out of the way (mostly out of Troy's way) was his and his friends best option, but that would never stop him from enjoying the work and enjoying the lectures and the lessons.

"Now, I want to play a little game or activity, if you'd like to call it that. This involves partners and before any of you ask, no you may not pick your partner and choose your best friend!" Mike didn't see a single one of his best friends in sight so that clearly wouldn't be applying to him. He also was now extremely nervous. He didn't do very well with people that weren't his friends. This would be very interesting for him...

"I'm going to do it in a much more creative way, after all this is English class and coming up with ideas off the top of our heads is a great way to start the period off!" Mr. Elliot clapped his hands together in delight, "So, here is a small slip of paper. I would like you to write your first name and your last name initial on the paper and place it in this hat here." He spoke proudly as he passed out the slips of paper and almost everyone in the room groaned, clearly displeased.

Mike placed his slip in the hat and as soon as he did, Mr. Elliot traveled back up to the front of the room, standing before everyone, "Alright, are we ready?" He beamed and his face fell flat at the unenthusiastic responses he got. He shrugged it off and began pulling names out of the hat pairing together each two in a row that he pulled out.

"Mike and Jane, you'll be partners."

Oh great.

Mike dropped his head into his right hand prepped on his desk. **'Lovely'**, he thought to himself sarcastically. A mouth breather for a partner was always fun...

He looked up and found Jane sitting directly next to him, causing

him to jump slightly in his chair, "Woah, didn't see you there..." He laughed nervously, side eyeing her as she pursed her lips awkwardly.

"Look, I saw what happened at lunch and I'm really sorry about my cousin, Stacey. She was really mean to your friend and Troy is just a big idiot." Her words hit him so fast that he didn't know if he processed them correctly. She was popular... *and nice*? And Stacey's *cousin*?

"Uh, thanks?" He wasn't going to let her fool him, no way. Something had to be up. This had Troy written all over it. A set up. No popular girl at this school is ever nice to the nerds. Even the ones who nobody really knew, but because they lounged around the cafeteria with Stacey and her squad of idiots, they were popular by *association*. And even being popular by association gave you perks, especially when it came to picking on the weaker.

"Look, I know Stacey is popular, but that doesn't mean I a-"

"Yes it does." He deadpanned, not even letting her finish her sentence. He already knew what she was going to say.

"Uh, no it doesn't"

"Popular by association. Stacey is popular. You're her cousin. So you're popular. It's pretty simple." He shrugged and explained it so nonchalantly and Jane wanted to laugh at him.

'Is this boy serious?'

She wondered if he was joking, but telling by the expression on his face and how he never faltered once, she took that as a no.

"Well I say I'm not. And if I say I'm not then I'm not." She shrugged back, using the same tone of voice and giving him a smirk.

"I don't know. In high school, it seems to me like you don't have much of a choice. Your clique chooses you. Not the other way around. And it seems like you've been chosen, on your *first* day." His last sentence dripped with sarcasm and he laughed a bit and she laughed in return and he sort of liked the way she laughed. It was genuine. A girl was genuinely laughing at a joke that he made.

One thing was definitely certain— Jane was popular by association, but maybe she wasn't supposed to be.

"Alright class, we're going to play a little game called two truths and a lie! More creative juices will get to flowing with this one, this time the creativity coming from you and not me! Now take your notebooks out and write down two true things about yourself and one lie about yourself and swap papers with your partner as soon as you are finished. Then you will circle what you think is your partner's lie! This is a great way to learn about your peers and get to know each other!"

Mike cringed and pondered if he was in the right classroom. This is the best his teacher could come up with for a Sophomore year high school English class? Weak.

Jane laughed and he noticed she must have caught onto his facial expression, "I haven't played this game since the 5 grade. Hm..." She tapped her chin, deep in thought before she started to stroke her pencil effortlessly against her notebook paper. Mike stared down at his blank notebook paper before cautiously starting to write.

I play Dungeons Dragons.

I'm bad at Math.

I'm 5'8.

Yes, if you were paying attention to my narration, you would have remembered that we talked about how Mike was good at every subject and he loved school. So, clearly being bad at math was his lie and wow, he never felt more lame in his entire life than he did right now. He looked up at Jane and back down at his paper, his cheeks flustered a bit. His answers were so... *nerdy*. He shrugged it off before switching papers.

I love eggos.

I'm popular.

My dad is the new chief of police in Hawkins.

Mike wanted to laugh out loud as he glanced back up at her, to see her looking back at him as she laughed for him.

"You really know how to get a point across, huh?" He asked her as he circled the second sentence, already knowing he was right with his decision. Easy points.

"You bet your ass I do." She responded with a smile.

"You're clever, Jane, but you're also in denial." Mike pursed his lips and tried to hold back his reciprocated smile, but he failed for sure, feeling the corners of his mouth crack.

She glared at him, trying to stifle her smile as well and looked down at Mike's answers, "Hm, I'll go with this one." She circled the last one and Mike was almost offended, did he really look that short? No way.

His face said it all as he stared at her answer and Jane giggled in response, "I'm totally kidding, you definitely look 5'8. I'll go with the bad at math. I feel it in my gut, there's no way you aren't good at math." Mike wanted to feel insulted, but she wasn't wrong. He knew the truth and clearly she did, too. He was a nerd. Oh well.

"Hey, I can't even be offended by your assumption that I'm a nerd because well, I am." He brushed it off and commented on her response neutrally.

"I mean, I totally wasn't trying to offend you. That probably sounded like I was, though. So I'm sorry if that's how it seemed to come out." She offered timidly, her eyes looking elsewhere as she felt like she had sounded rude.

"It's cool, no sweat, Jane."

"Oh god, don't call me Jane. I know you were in my homeroom class, I said call me El. So that applies to everyone, including *you*." She scrunched her nose up as he said her first name for the second time within a matter of minutes, before correcting him quickly.

"Okay, El."

"Alright, kids, let's see how we did!"

Mike and El smiled at each other in acceptance. Mike wasn't too sure why she was being so friendly to him and he didn't plan on completely ruling out that it was all a big set up by Troy, but in that moment he thought she was pretty down to earth for someone popular—*by association*.